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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: SPAIN TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN HEALTH AND  
FISHERIES SECTORS

11. (U) Charge d'Affaires and Poloff (notetaker) met May 14 with Cristina Diaz Fernandez-Gil, Assistant Director for Cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Fernandez-Gil was accompanied by Spain's Honorary Consul in Liberia Manuel Cuenca, Carolina Diz Otero of the Galicia Region's Office for Foreign Cooperation, and Luis Padilla Macabeo of the Canary Islands' Office for African Relations. Fernandez-Gil told Charge that the delegation came to Liberia in response to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's appeal for assistance during her March 2007 visit to Madrid. She said the delegation would identify two projects that Spain could carry out in Liberia, one in the health sector and one in fisheries. Fernandez-Gil said the delegation would meet with Minister of Gender Varbah Gayflor to explore ways of assisting with gender issues, particularly support for women entrepreneurs and promoting legislation to protect women.

12. (SBU) Fernandez-Gil noted that the local governments of the regions of Galicia and the Canary Islands were invited to explore carrying out projects in Liberia because the Spanish Government cannot provide bilateral assistance since Liberia is not included in Spain's Africa plan. According to Fernandez-Gil, the Liberian Government requested infrastructure support for the port of Monrovia. Fernandez-Gil said Spain provides training, but does not provide infrastructure assistance. Charge said poor management and corruption are serious problems at the port and suggested that the delegation meet with the port's Liberia Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) advisor. Charge also suggested that the Spanish consider providing help in building a fish market with cold storage since many women in Liberia work as fish mongers, and this could assist in two ways by promoting fisheries development and by assisting women entrepreneurs with better retail facilities.

13. (SBU) In response to Fernandez-Gil's query about the state of the Liberian health sector, Charge noted that many NGOs that focused on emergency health care in rural areas are pulling out as Liberia evolves from an emergency phase to a focus on development. He said the Ministry of Health is not yet equipped to adequately provide health services to the people. Charge added that malaria is the major health problem in the country and that the USG would be increasing engagement in this area as Liberia has been selected as a target country for the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). He added that reliable health data has not been available, but that a demographic health survey is currently underway.

14. (U) Fernandez-Gil announced that as part of Spain's growing engagement in West Africa, a diplomat would be assigned to Sierra Leone in August who would also have responsibility for covering Liberia. This diplomat will have

a desk in the European Commission office in Monrovia. She also stated that Spain has created a 10 million Euro fund with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to promote women's empowerment in Africa.

Booth